

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

COMMUNITY CENTRE REVIEW UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING, CUSTOMER AND BUILDING SERVICES AND HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the Community Centre Review, setting out the outcome of the Community Centre Management Committee engagement exercise, which presented options to Community Centre Management Committees and community groups to change the existing operating model which would both deliver community centre budget savings as well as update current non-compliant operating leases.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Notes the community centres saving totals £1.073 million, which is comprised of the approved staffing saving of £573,000 and the planned £500,000 for property costs for standalone community centres, resulting from the reviewed delivery models;
2. Notes that the £500,000 property related savings are phased for 2026/27 and 2027/28 and will require Council approval.
3. Notes the potential additional saving that may be achieved by expanding the scope of the saving to include Partnership Centres and School Wings set out in section D.2;
4. Agrees to the inclusion of Partnership Centres and School Wings within the scope of the saving measure;
5. Notes the engagement and support provided to the Community Centre Management Committees set out in section D.3;
6. Notes the timetable for engagement and reporting to PDSP and Council Executive on the outcome of the engagement set out in section D.5; and
7. Agree that officers should continue to progress with the engagement exercise and proposed reporting in line section D.5.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Open, Honest and Accountable Caring and Compassionate Collaborate, Inclusive and Adaptive
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations 2010 The scenarios set out in the paper for discussion

have had an initial Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) prepared. As the proposal progresses the IIA will be further developed to ensure equality issues are fully identified and mitigated. The scenarios would also ensure legal compliance with the Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations 2010.

The council's approved Corporate Asset Management Strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33 establishes the need to rationalise and reduce the number of operational assets that the council holds.

III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	No anticipated impact on performance and indicators at present, this will be kept under review.
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Outcome 8 - We make the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built environment.
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	<p>Savings of £573,000 relating to staff in Housing, Customer and Building Services for the rationalisation of community centres were approved as part of the budget setting process in February 2023 and re-phased to allow adequate time to undertake a thorough engagement process and implementation. In addition, property related savings of £500,000 are planned for 2026/27 and 2027/28 based on the proposed options replacing the existing service delivery model. The target savings are £790,000 in 2026/27 and £283,000 in 2027/28.</p> <p>The council's approved General Services Ten Year Capital Investment Strategy 203/24 to 2032/33 is fully committed and does not include provision for any capital expenditure on the community centres portfolio.</p> <p>Staff required for the management of asset transfer requests will be provided from existing resources.</p>
VII Consideration at PDSP	The approach to saving delivery will be reported to the Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP and Council Executive
VIII Other consultations	<p>Housing, Customer and Building Services Finance and Property Services Community Wealth Building Team Legal Services HR Services Corporate Communication Team</p>

Education
Facilities Management

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 BACKGROUND

The Council approved a new five-year revenue strategy and three-year detailed revenue budgets on 21 February 2023. Total savings of £34.7 million have been agreed over the five-year planning period for council services taking account of the full year effect of savings agreed in the latter two years.

Savings of £573,000 relating to staff in Housing, Customer and Building Services for the community centres were approved as part of the budget setting process in February 2023 and re-phased to allow adequate time to undertake a thorough engagement process and implementation. In addition, property related savings of £500,000 are planned for 2026/27 and 2027/28 based on the proposed options replacing the existing service delivery model. The target savings are £790,000 in 2026/27 and £283,000 in 2027/28.

The council's approved General Services Ten Year Capital Investment Strategy 2023/24 to 2032/33 is fully committed and does not include provision for any capital expenditure to undertake essential maintenance works at community centres.

Recognised as highly valued community assets, the council is seeking to establish a more sustainable operating model for the Community Centres.

D.2 COMMUNITY CENTRE OPERATING MODELS

Council officers have identified three sustainable operating models for community centres going forward that would achieve the required savings , whilst enabling the community centres to thrive.. These options are:

- Option 1 - Transfer of ownership under Community Asset Transfer (CAT) - This option is applicable to stand-alone community centres only, but would deliver the saving if all standalone community centres transferred to community groups under CAT.
- Option 2: Full Repairing and Insuring lease agreements (FRI lease). This approach would mean that there would be full delivery of the target £1.073m saving, but it would not address the ownership of the community centres and the capital investment required to maintain the assets. Option 2 is applicable to stand-alone community centres only.
- Option 3: Recharging to Management Committees (Default Arrangement) – Proposed as the default arrangement and revised operating model for Community Centre Management Committees, where they do not choose to progress with CAT or a lease arrangement. This option would enable the community centres to operate on a self-sustaining basis, with Management Committees/Community Groups being re-charged all of the revenue costs associated with the operation of the community centres. This option would fully deliver the target £1.073m saving but would not address the ownership of the community centres and the capital investment required to maintain the assets. Option 3 is applicable to all community centres whether stand-alone or within an existing council building.

The original proposal only included community centre facilities, however following further consideration the scope of the project has been expanded to include Partnership Centres and School Community Wings. This would mean that the operating model for Management Committees in Partnership Centres and School Wings would also change to require contributions to be made to meet all associated property and staffing costs.

Additional savings generated through the introduction of a revised operating model in Partnership Centres and School Wings would contribute to delivery of the target £1.073m saving, and could be used to offset any potential financial impact on council services from the changes to the operating model for community centres. The additional saving could also be used as a means of establishing a recurring “enabling fund” that would support management committees or community groups who might require either capital or revenue funding to support their revised business model going forward.

The value of potential additional savings from Partnership Centres and School Wings is being developed in discussion with the Management Committees based on the floor area occupied by the community facility and the hours of access. The value of the saving is currently estimated to be in the region of £580,000, however this will require further refining as part of discussions with Management Committees in Partnership Centres and School Community Wings on the size of the community area and the staffing requirements of the community facility.

D.3 COMMUNITY CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

D.3.1 Engagement and Support

Officers have been engaging and supporting Management Committees, community groups and community centre users to identify options for each community. The focus of the engagement work with the Management Committees has been to support community centres in continuing to operate going forward, with the discussion focusing on the three options set out Section D.2, whilst encouraging management committees and community groups to consider any other option which would allow the continued financially sustainable operation of the community centre.

Each Management Committee has received a community centre information pack which is specific to their community centre. This included information on building costs, current staffing resource and costs, information on CAT, information on FRI leases, external funding sources and officer support available.

The engagement and support have taken the form of:

- Face to Face meeting with the Steering Group of Management Committees
- A series of three “Neighbourhood meetings” with each community centre in each neighbourhood invited
- Community centre information packs
- Individual meetings with Management Committees where requested, to provide support on considering options, including follow up meetings.
- Dedicated email address for Management Committees to ask specific questions for the provision of information
- Webpage providing information and FAQs on CAT and FRI lease arrangements.
- Workshops for Management Committees to attend providing information and support on what the Management Committee could be considering and implementing.

Management Committee Workshops

The first of four workshops were held on 2 September 2024 and was attended by

representatives from 19 Management Committees. The purpose of the workshop was to provide Management Committees with suggested areas of work that should help to inform their decision ahead of January 2025. A presentation was delivered by the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) on what Management Committees would need to consider for implementation of any community ownership as well as support available from COSS, there was also a presentation from representative of Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Community Development Trust on their successful transfer of ownership of two buildings and how this works in practice, both the positive and negatives, and the benefits they are seeing in the community. A recording of the session along with the slides and a further information and support pack has been circulated to Management Committees.

Following on from this initial workshop a further three other workshops were held in October 2024, with COSS running two of the workshops utilising their specialist skills, knowledge and support. The workshops build on the themes of support requirements raised by Management Committees.

- Workshop 1 – Facilitated by the COSS facilities management advisor. The workshop considered the legal and regulatory responsibilities, operational management of the building and maintenance of the building fabric.
- Workshop 2 – Facilitated by officers from the Community Wealth Building Team and Economic Development with input from the VSGWL the workshop focused on how to engage communities, how to identify and access external funding, how to develop a business plan and what legal structures would be most suitable for a Management Committee.
- Workshop 3 – This workshop was facilitated by COSS and considered how to involve the community, feasibility research and the processes to be followed.

The level of engagement and participation by the Management Committees has been varied. Appendix 1 provides an overview of Management Committee attendance at the workshops and other engagement with council officers.

D.3.2 Management Committee Income Generation

Key to the successful delivery of the target saving, for each of the three options, is that Community Centre Management Committees move towards a more self-sustaining business like approach to the operation of the community centres model where income from, and utilisation of, the buildings is increased in tandem with a drive to reduce running costs.

Officers have previously undertaken a potential income generation analysis, which demonstrated that there is scope for Management Committees to change their charging policies to generate additional income. For example, Table 1 below sets out the average hourly charge applied by Management Committees for meeting room and main hall lets compared with the Council's approved charges for 2024/25.

Table 1 – Management Committee Average Hourly Charge Rates 2024/25

	Meeting Room		Main Hall	
	Non-Commercial £	Commercial £	Non-Commercial £	Commercial £
Average Management Committee Letting Fee	7.29	10.32	13.10	18.99
West Lothian	11.58	29.78	18.86	51.53

Council Letting Fee				
Difference	(4.29)	(19.46)	(5.76)	(32.54)

The detailed analysis of potential income generation for each community centre has been shared with Management Committees, and they have been advised to consider their charging policies.

Potential Impact on Council Services

For the operation of community centres to move towards a more business-like approach, Management Committees will need to consider the activities held within the community centres and the charges that apply, and included within this will be lettings that are currently given for free. These free lets include council delivered activities, for example youth clubs, employability activities, high school activities and other community-based activities. Officers have completed an exercise identifying the council activities that currently operate from community centres which receive a free let.

The analysis has identified a potential budget impact on council services in the region of £112,000 if the services were to remain where and when they currently are delivered and are charged a rate that is 50% of the rates applied for school letting. However, consideration could be given to utilising any additional savings arising from income being received from Partnership Centres and School Wings to offset the costs to council services and therefore allow the activities to continue on a cost neutral basis to the council.

Further work is required to be undertaken to develop the revised operating model for Partnership Centres based on a percentage of the operating costs for the Partnership centre calculated on the floor area occupied by the community facility and the hours of access. Further work will then be undertaken to confirm whether additional income generated via a revised model for Partnership Centres could fully offset potential charges for council services using community facilities.

External Funding

Community Centre Management Committees and other groups and charitable organisations are able to access funding streams which are not available to local authorities, for example the Scottish Land Fund, National Lottery Community Fund and Investing in Communities Fund, Place-Based Investment Programme. Capital grants, for example the Capital Regeneration Grant Fund are available that allow groups to undertake capital works in the community centres. The Management Committees are being encouraged and supported to access these funds.

D.4 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Communication with members of the public and service users has taken place via press release, social media posts, posters and banners within each community centre. The communications have set out why the current arrangements are no longer viable and call on communities to support the community centre to be sustainable.

Other Engagement

As part of CAT policy, there is a requirement for officers to undertake promotion of CAT more generally to increase awareness across all community groups of what it means, the benefits and the approach available.

This will be rolled-out following engagement with Management Committees in early 2025 via roadshows, webpages and social media and will be targeted at other local

groups who may be interested in operating community centres and other council buildings.

The engagement with Management Committees has already generated some queries from other community groups regarding CAT, for both community centres and other council buildings, and groups have been encouraged to engage with the Management Committees and have also been taken as a note for future point of contact.

D.5 Next Steps

The Community Centre Management Committees have been asked to provide an indication of their preferred option for continued operation of their community centre by 10 January 2025. To date the council has yet to receive any formal responses, however there have been indications of alternative options being submitted and a verbal update on the number of returns and options preference, including any alternative proposals, will be provided at the Council Executive meeting on 14 January 2025.

The key milestones, set out below in Table 2, have been developed based on the timeline required to commence delivery of the savings from April 2026 and ensure a sustainable operating model. This means that the requirement for Management Committees to indicate their preference by January 2025 will provide over a year for both Management Committees and council officers to take the necessary steps to progress and deliver the saving, both in-line with the council's community asset transfer policy but also providing time to implement leases and recharging arrangements.

Table 2 - Timescales and Key Deliverables

Deliverable / Milestone	Target Timescale
Management Committee Engagement	May 2024 to December 2024
Management Committee Feedback	January 2025
Council Executive Approval to incorporate additional savings for Partnership Centres and Community Wings to ensure parity across Management Committees and communities	January 2025
CAT Roadshows	February 2025 and April 2025
Corporate Policy and Resources PDSP consideration of the outcome of engagement	February 2025
Council Executive approval on delivery of the saving	March 2025
Briefing to Management Committees on approval, approach and timescales to the agreed options	April 2025
Public and Community Group awareness and engagement	April 2025
Briefing to the Community Centre Management Committee Federation on the approved saving and the timetable for delivery	April 2025
Detailed implementation of agreed option for each individual community centre	April 2025 – March 2026
Staff reorganisation	Summer 2025 -Spring 2026

The activities required to deliver the saving following the January 2025 date will include supporting Management Committees to develop and refine business plans, support community engagement and promotion of the community centre activities and to follow the required legal processes for each option given, including workforce management changes and lease development and implementation.

In addition, officers may require time to engage with other community groups to investigate alternative arrangements with other groups and charitable organisations for the continued delivery of community centres should a Management Committee decide that they do not want to progress with any option. Further engagement with other community groups within each community will be progressed once the position of each Management Committee is confirmed.

A further update will be reported to the Corporate, Policy and Resources PDSP on 21 February 2025.

E. CONCLUSION

The delivery of the approved budget saving requires a clear, methodical, planned, well communicated and evidenced approach. Officers have identified three alternative delivery models for community centres going forward with the objective of giving Management Committees a range of options that would ensure their sustainability under a different model to the existing arrangement.

The council has undertaken significant engagement with Community Centre Management Committees over the last 8 months. The timescales for the next steps in the engagement process sets out a clear timescale and stages to be progressed, and ongoing engagement with, and support to, the Management Committees and other interested parties. This is the key to delivering sustainable operating models for community centres across West Lothian.

Following the receipt of feedback from the Management Committees, the council will enter into further engagement with them in order to discuss their position and to work with them to progress sustainable operating options. This may include alternative proposals submitted by the Management Committees or other community groups. with the aim of ensuring their place in local communities into the future.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Fourth National Planning Framework: position statement

Council Executive 28 November 2016 – West Lothian Council Community Asset Transfer Policy
West Lothian Council 13 February 2018 – Revenue Budget 2018/19 – 2022/23

West Lothian Council 13 February 2018 – Asset Management Strategy and General Services
Ten Year Capital Investment Programme 2018/19 - 2027/28

Appendices/Attachments:

Appendix 1 –Management Committee Engagement Record

Contact Persons:

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14 January 2025

APPENDIX 1 - MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT RECORD

Ward	Ward Area	Community Centre/Partnership Centre	Location	Neighbourhood Briefing	Individual Management Committee Meetings	Workshop 1 Open Night	Workshop 2 Facilities Management	Workshop 3 Understanding your community and income generation	Workshop 4 Community Ownership	Post Workshop Meetings at Management Committee Request
1	Linlithgow	Community Centre	Bridgend	N/A	Meeting with User Groups	N/A				
1	Linlithgow	Community Centre	Chalmers Hall	N/A	Meeting with User Group	N/A				
1	Linlithgow	Community Centre	Newton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
1	Linlithgow	Community Centre	Philpstoun	✓	✓					✓
2	Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	Community Centre	Dechmont	✓	✓					✓
2	Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	Community Centre	Uphall	✓	✓					
2	Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	Community Centre	Winchburgh	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh	Partnership Centre	Strathbrock	✓	✓	✓			✓	
3	Livingston North	Community Centre	Carmondean	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Livingston North	Community Centre	Livingston Station	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
3	Livingston North	Community Centre	Mosswood		✓					
3	Livingston North	Community Centre	Newyearfield Farm	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Livingston South	Community Centre	Bellsquarry	✓	✓			✓	✓	
4	Livingston South	Community Centre	Crofthead	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Livingston South	Community Centre	Forestbank	✓	✓					
4	Livingston South	Community Centre	Murieston	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
4	Livingston South	Partnership Centre	Lanthorn	✓						✓
5	East Livingston and East Calder	Community Centre	Kirknewton		✓	✓		✓	✓	
5	East Livingston and East Calder	Community Centre	Mid Calder	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
5	East Livingston and East Calder	Community Centre	Uphall Station		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	East Livingston and East Calder	Partnership Centre	East Calder	✓		✓				
6	Fauldhouse and The Breich Valley	Community Centre	Addiewell	✓	✓	✓				✓

Ward	Ward Area	Community Centre/Partnership Centre	Location	Neighbourhood Briefing	Individual Management Committee Meetings	Workshop 1 Open Night	Workshop 2 Facilities Management	Workshop 3 Understanding your community and income generation	Workshop 4 Community Ownership	Post Workshop Meetings at Management Committee Request
6	Fauldhouse and The Breich Valley	Community Centre	Stoneyburn	✓						
6	Fauldhouse and The Breich Valley	Community Centre	West Calder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Fauldhouse and The Breich Valley	Partnership Centre	Fauldhouse	✓	✓					✓
7	Whitburn and Blackburn	Community Centre	East Whitburn	✓	✓					
7	Whitburn and Blackburn	Community Centre	Seafield	✓	✓	✓				
7	Whitburn and Blackburn	Community Centre	Whitburn	✓						
7	Whitburn and Blackburn	Partnership Centre	Blackburn	✓	✓	✓				
8	Bathgate	Partnership Centre	Bathgate	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
9	Armadale and Blackridge	Community Centre	Craiginn	✓	✓					✓
9	Armadale and Blackridge	Community Centre	Torphichen	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
9	Armadale and Blackridge	Partnership Centre	Armadale	✓	✓					✓